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ABSTRACT

Research on women can influence policies and behavior in the public and private sectors if existing institutional structures and the areas to be influenced are taken into consideration. Five projects undertaken by the Center for Research on Women and Wellesley College (Massachusetts) illustrate optimum strategies for conducting applied and policy-oriented research on women. Individual projects addressed the problems of a dearth of research on women conducted by women, women's inability to compete equally with men in the job market because of family responsibilities, the absence of women in positions of executive power within American businesses, the failure of men to take responsibility for the daily care of their children, and the Center's failure to award grants for women's research to minority women. Each of these projects met considerable success in alleviating the given problem because it worked from within accepted political or social structures and thus the findings and recommendations were accepted and publicized. For example, the goal of encouraging research on women by women was met by establishing a grant program for tenured female faculty within the college, the problem of female entry into executive business positions was studied through a grant provided by a private business corporation, and the issue of women's inability to compete with men for jobs because of child care demands was addressed through a United States Civil Rights Commission grant to study child care facilities. (LP)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Research on women can lead to action in a number of ways. In this paper, we will review five cases in which we have found that as scholars undertaking research on women, we can to some extent influence policies and behavior in the public and private sectors. The co-authors of this paper come from one of the centers for research on women in the United States. Our Center has a staff of 38 people working on 15 research projects and programs. We raise our own money for research from the government, from private foundations, corporations, and from other donors. We specialize in five areas of research: Employment, Family, Minority Women, Adult Development and Aging, and Higher Education. Within these areas we specialize in applied and policy-oriented research.

The Center's aim has been first to help build a body of knowledge about women, and then to help to put that knowledge to work in decision-making and policy-making processes of the society. This work is needed in every sector of United States society. The fact that women are half the population has scarcely been recognized. Moreover, what little information and theory on women exists has had little impact on

universities, on government, on corporations, and on women's and men's behavior.

Nevertheless, we find that as scholars, we can put research on women to use in bringing about social change if we first analyze the institutional structures around us, then define the areas we want to influence, and then create strategies which let us bring new knowledge and new policies into existing structures. We can learn to work within existing institutional structures to further new agendas.

This type of action-oriented research is designed to accomplish a variety of kinds of change within the framework of already stated institutional goals. Our work corresponds with that of many members of the women's movement who are working to alter institutional goals themselves, while we are chiefly doing work from within to use old structures in new ways. Potentially, both types of work are mutually reinforcing and complementary. Those working within already stated institutional goals are spurred to ask new research questions and to dare to be uncompromisingly innovative on account of the vision and action of feminists outside of traditional institutions. At the same time, workers outside the traditional institutions are stimulated to continue their work as they see that it bears fruit; even our most conservative institutions can change somewhat on account of pressures from women who have found a new confidence to act together.

The first problem we addressed is the lack of information on women collected by women and analyzed from their perspectives. Intellectual theories in the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences are based primarily on an information base of powerful men's experience in the public spheres of life. Scholars have had little to say about the experiences of

women and of most men working in the private or domestic spheres as they undertake activities providing the basic support for society's institutions. Most of the world's experience has been overlooked by researchers who, far from being "objective", were working from a highly selective bias.

We chose the university as our arena for work on developing knowledge about women, since the university is already committed to the search for knowledge. How could one Center for Research on Women multiply the effect of our own interest in research on women so that we would persuade others within university structures to study women too, and through this study change the intellectual theories which structure academic disciplines? We drew on certain patterns, conventions and values which are already firmly entrenched in the American university system. First, most undergraduate faculty members teach hundred of students over a period of several years. We concentrated on assistance to teaching faculty who would transmit new knowledge to a large number of students. Second, there is a demand that faculty do research and there is a widespread practice of giving faculty leaves of absence to do research and to get a respite from teaching. Third, there is a desire on the part of university administrators that their faculty obtain financial grants from sources outside of the university. Fourth, there is the general practice of awarding lifetime tenure to senior professors.

Taking advantage of these institutional conventions which are already in place, we started a Faculty Development Program. We offered grants to faculty members so that they could take leaves of absence to do research. However, we put certain conditions on the grants. Faculty receiving the grants must do research on women, and it must lead to change in the courses

they taught as part of the university's main curriculum. Moreover, we established a policy of giving preference to tenured grant applicants, who have a guarantee of lifelong employment in a given institution. These faculty are best placed to bring about curricular change without risking their jobs.

In this way, we used universities' institutional policies and preferences with regard to research, leaves, outside grants, and tenure in order to bring about change. Every professor to whom we have given a grant is an instrument of change both on a campus and within a given academic discipline. Every student educated by such a professor is a potential instrument of change. Because our grants stipulate that the recipient must not only do, but also use, research to change the main curriculum, we are creating institutional change. Moreover, since the attainment of any grant carries prestige, we are raising the prestige of research on women in the estimate of university administrators, as well as increasing the overall body of knowledge about women. Money is a powerful lever which allows us to alter university research and curriculum in this way, but even without much money, research institutes can support scholars with working space, use of facilities, and titles such as "visiting researcher;" such grants of space and affiliation also carry prestige in our country. In this first instance, the problem was--and is--gross incompleteness in our body of knowledge about women and the university is the arena in which we have tried to work on that problem.

The second problem which we addressed is women's inability to compete on equal terms in the job market because of the child care burdens which make unequal demands on the women and the men in job pools. In this case, the institution we worked through was the federal government. We used

research which we did on a government contract to publicize this problem of inequity to which the government itself has contributed. Various branches of government frequently call on scholars for assessment and evaluation. Having amassed a group of scholars who were expert on the subject of women's employment, we were a natural research and policy panel for one branch of the government, the Civil Rights Commission. We were asked to prepare a report on the extent to which federal child care policies and programs frustrate the federal goal of equity for women in education and employment.

A tradition of criticism across bureaucratic lines in government was already in place. We examined both the government's explicit childcare policies and its implicit ones, buried in federal employment program guidelines and educational programs. We used existing research on these programs as the basis for the analysis, and did some investigative research on the effects of federal policy on women's equal opportunity. The six Center staff members who worked on the project had to develop new techniques of argument; for in order to create a document to be printed by a government agency, they had to document in the manner of a legal brief each fact and each statement drawn from analysis. Furthermore, each of the findings in the resulting sixty-page document was reviewed and in some cases passages were challenged by the government agencies mentioned in the report.

After a series of meetings and negotiations, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission accepted, published, and distributed 20,000 copies of the report. The Commission rejected, however, the policy recommendations contained in the concluding section of the original report. Nevertheless, Center staff gave interviews and wrote articles for the national media,

making every effort to bring our recommendations as well as our main findings to the attention of the public. We have distributed our recommendations to many members of the U.S. House of Representatives, with whom we keep in touch in part thrcugh the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues. And we have helped to set up model programs for before-school and after-school day care in eight United States communities. We can point to these as models for the kind of family support system which the government needs to endorse.

In confronting the problem of scarcity of information about women, the institution to work through is the one already committed to the search for knowledge: the university. In the case of the inequity of double burdens on women and of male-oriented employment policies and work schedules, the logical institution to work through is the federal government, whose Commission on Civil Rights is devoted to the achievement of equity, but whose policies contribute to inequity. In the first instance, we assist university faculty to correct university-sponsored narrowness of knowledge and curriculum. In the second, we have shown that the federal government itself, as the country's largest employer and as an official advocate of equal employment opportunity is one of the chief offenders in creating child care policies which work at odds with women's employment opportunity. In both cases, then, the critique of the structures was carried on through the structures themselves.

The third problem which we addressed centers around the fact that women hold very few of the positions of executive power in United States corporations and businesses. The logical institution in which to do our research was the corporation. But in what way could we appeal to the corporation's interest? Just as the university is devoted to the search

for knowledge, and the U.S. Civil Rights Commission to the search for equity, the corporation is devoted to the search for the effective deployment of resources in order to maximize productivity and profit. Appealing to the corporation's wish to increase its productivity, we secured corporate funding to do research on women as managers and on women's career patterns within corporations. The problem from our point of view was that women do not rise in hierarchical structures past a certain point. The desire of the corporation was to achieve more effective use of women employees, leading to better productivity and profit. Again, we drew on institutional trends already in evidence. One such trend in the corporate world is the process of constant self-evaluation. Another is the practice of bringing in outside consultants who specialize in certain areas of knowledge; in this case, we supplied special knowledge about women's employment and career patterns. A third is certain corporations' wish to appear to be in compliance with "affirmative action" guidelines, which therefore made them willing to give funds for the study of women. Fourth is the interest of the company in keeping morale of employees high, in this case by assuring women employees that it was doing something for them by bringing in a research team which had their particular interests specifically in mind.

In the course of research on women in corporations, we learned about a series of visible and invisible barriers preventing women from progressing upward through the corporate hierarchy. The Center then publicized its findings to corporate management, describing the nature of the barriers faced by women and the costs in productivity of maintaining these barriers. Once again the critique came from within the traditional institution and was sponsored by it, and has now been nationally publicized on television

and in the New York Times, like each of the other projects mentioned here.

A fourth problem we identified is that of the comparative absence of men from participation in the day-to-day care of their children. In this final case, the target was not a public institution; it is not a university, a governmental body, or a corporation. Rather, the targeted group in this case is the mass of American fathers. What agenda could we appeal to in this group? Men as fathers are not primarily engaged in the search for knowledge, the search for equity, or the search for productivity and profit. What, then, is their main aim? In the case of fatherhood, we could appeal to men's search for personal growth and improvement. For although personal growth and improvement have had high priority for affluent United States males for at least 100 years, they have had especially high priority for many young Americans since the 1960's, and increasingly during the 1970's. We are talking here about personal growth quite separated from collective societal goals and needs.

Men's personal search for growth has been registered particularly in the pages of the popular psychology journals, on television "talk shows," in newspaper columns, and in the creation of many discussion and consciousness-raising groups of men who now meet together in the United States to discuss male roles and changing relationships to gender assignments. Athletic teams and leagues for fathers and sons already exist and certain schools and communities have programs which involve men in the fathering activities connected with their children. Therefore, our Fatherhood Project works with already existing programs to extend them further. It has created a catalogue of innovative programs which are increasing father participation in childrearing, and is currently developing a trade book about the determinants and effects of father

involvement in child care, and the possibilities of institutional change which will make fathers' participation in parenting more likely and more feasible. In addition, the Fatherhood Project is developing models which, in helping men to become more active fathers, also challenge our stereotypes and norms of what men are supposed to be.

Many arguments about fathering are concerned with the well-being of children. For instance, some have argued that fathers should be involved in their children's care because this prevents boys from becoming homosexual. Another group has given a different argument: that fathers should become involved in child care so that their children will become more androgynous in nature. Our particular agenda is based on our research finding that one significant benefit of father involvement in parenting is the gratification and growth that accrues to the father himself. We are thereby using a personal agenda of the American male - the self-conscious pursuit of happiness which has grown especially strong since the 1960's - to serve as a vehicle of dissemination of new ideas. The project helps to suggest that wider definitions of what is acceptable "male" activity might be beneficial to individual males. Our own wider aim is a changed society for women and men.

The fifth problem is one which we found within a project at our own Center for Research on Women. Over a four-year period, we had given 35 grants to faculty in the New England region to do research on women, but not one grant had been given to a Black woman. We had funded faculty research <u>on</u> but not <u>by</u> Black women. How could we work within the structure of this project to change its inadvertently racist policies and procedures? We needed to do both informal research to find out whether the application procedure was racist and more extensive research to find out where minority

women might be reached so that they might apply.

One of the Center's own research projects helped us. Our large government-funded project called "Black Women's Educational Policy and Research Network" had built up a mailing list of 1,300 Black women in American educational policy and research areas. Members of the project staff identified 600 women from this list who should receive our application forms. The project's leader, together with Black advisors from two other institutions, helped us to structure the application form and procedures so that we did not discriminate against very busy, untenured, junior faculty members. Moreover, we wrote a letter specifically to these 600 minority women inviting them to apply for fellowships. As a result of changes in publicity and application procedure, 40 percent of the funding for research scholars next year will go to minority women.

In the case of all five problems which we have presented, we have used an existing institution or group and its present structures and conventions to generate new information which can be used for social change. The changes have led to improved ability to meet announced institutional goals. We have used the university, the government, the corporation, individual men, and our own Center as the focus of change efforts; we have done so by appealing to their respective goals of a broader base of knowledge, wider opportunities for all, larger profits, personal growth, and work about and for all women.

In furthering institutions' announced goals, we also alter institutions which can then, in turn, tolerate a higher degree of protest and activism on the part of women within them, and can sustain a higher pace of change. We are indebted as we work <u>within</u> existing institutional goals, to those brave women of the past and present who simply refuse to

work within defined institutions and goals, and who either reject or wish to change social institutions entirely. Both groups of workers produce valid action, and though they may do differing types of research, these two kinds of research are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily in conflict. One line of research calls into question the basic assumptions of our social institutions, and also the definitions of such concepts as "family," "work" and "productivity." The line of work described here, on the other hand, expands the boundaries of change possible within our current institutions and vocabularies. Neither kind of change effort can persevere without the other. Those working pragmatically within current structures need the examples and ideas of more radical change agents. We particularly need constant reminders of the pervasive racism and class bias as well as gender bias in our institutional and social structures and of the fact that our research will simply reinforce racist, classist, and sexist behavior unless--and perhaps even if--we take special measures to resist traditional modes of thought and behavior. We can in turn help women in the non-academic branches of the women's movement by giving them evidence that social change is spreading within traditional institutions thanks to their efforts and to their vision. We are all working for a world in which the aim is the decent survival of all in our diversity, rather than the so-called excellence and privacy and privilege of a few at the expense of the rest.

Communication of results to the widest possible audience is an important facet of all kinds of effort toward social action and social change. No one project or Center working through private channnels can reach the numbers and groups of women who need assistance or support from the findings of on-going research on women. For many of us who are

undertaking research on women, direct interaction with the media and with other groups generating widespread publicity seems risky at best and very hard to manage. Social change requires, however, that the meaning of new research become visible to the greatest possible number. Therefore, it is necessary to find avenues for presenting the results of research to policy-makers and to women in all walks of life and to seek out creative ways to make the meaning of research work visible.

Communication and outreach are expensive endeavors and their payoff comes chiefly in the long term. For this reason it is most imperative to cooperate in dissemination with other organizations sharing similar goals. The Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, for instance, collaborates in a National Council for Research on Women, newly founded this year. As noted previously, we collaborate with the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues, made up of federal legislative representatives who are interested in designing legislation to take account of women's interests. We are now exploring the development of collaborative working papers and book-advertising with other centers for research on women. We work to create and maintain ties with news reporters, magazine editors, T.V. and radio reporters and talk show hosts.

Reseachers on women who wish to put research into action will repeatedly encounter a tension within academic institutions between the idea of "pure knowledge" and the idea that knowledge should be generated in such a way as to be useful to human beings' actual lives. Researchers on women need to develop strategies of argument and also internal conviction about the legitmate relationship of research to social action. The sources of the tension between an idea of "pure" research and an idea of "applied" research may be traced back as far as Plato's distinctions between soul and

body, spirit and matter, essential and accidental life. From the Platonic tradition comes a downgrading of practical, everyday work associated with upkeep, maintenance of human life, and relationships between people. Abstract thinking is in the Platonic tradition both highy rewarded and highly valued. In liberal arts traditions, the separation of most scholarly work from the day-by-day tasks of living is considered to be a point in its favor; in the newer disciplines, or newer universities, or independent research institutes, applied research to be used by human beings is not seen as antithetical to university aims, but is seen as consonant with those aims.

A feminist analysis allows us now to see that in our culture, it has only been a few men in positions of considerable power who have had the privilege to do their work in isolation, above consideration of most people's daily lives, thoughts, and needs. Those in the lower caste positions, who lack obvious economic and political power, have been most often assigned to deal with the daily thoughts, needs, and chores involved in taking care of other people. When we do applied research by and on and for women in elite liberal arts faculty settings, we are breaking taboos. For women seem like a contaminant in the subject matter of intellectual history, economics, political science, or philosophy as they are defined in elite traditions. Women today doing research on their own conditions and wanting to use that research to accomplish practical work and change may continue to be seen as something of a contaminant in the making of public or private policy. Our agendas will continue to seem alien to many makers of policy, who would like to make public policy "pure" and uncomplicated by reference to the women's spheres of daily life. We are asking that policy now reflect all human needs and lead to the making of a

balanced and peaceful society for everyone. But since many policy-makers of the past have come out of the tradition of the abstractly-conceived or the abstractly powerful idea, we must expect resistance as we continue to work toward material needs, and common-sense concerns, and the creation of policymakers who see themselves as human beings embedded in daily life.

We have given five examples of research in circumscribed areas, each designed to allow an institution or a group to move better toward its professed goals. Our research has also revealed the possibility of balancing our institutions and their ideals by validating and taking into account women's lives. Our work with university faculty brings into the main curriculum information about women as that half of the world's population which has been especially engaged in the vital work of making and maintaining society. Our work with the federal government has shown that the whole sphere of child care and its needs and values is incompatible with the rigidity of workplace schedules and policies, especially as imposed by those who claim an interest in equity for women. Our work in the corporation has indicated that women's productivity is being underutilized, and our work with fathers indicates that there are untapped caretaking resources in men which correspond with the assigned work of the women's spheres and which can be used to enrich men's lives. Our work to improve our Center practices shows us how the hierarchical thinking about race which we were taught trains us to overlook those who can teach the most about survival. All of the work, in public and private lives, to recognize and validate the survival-work of the assigned women's spheres fits in with, and gains from, other social movements toward a better balanced society. In the university, the government, the corporation, the individual father, and ourselves,we are finding that the assigned work of the traditional women's spheres is <u>vital</u>,

central to human knowledge, order, profit, well-being, and balance. To the extent that institutions claim to be working for knowledge, order, profit, well-being, and balance, we can use research on women to help them make good on their claims.

The talk presented by Peggy McIntosh at the closing plenary session of the Montreal Conference, August 2, 1982, is available from her at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA 02181.